DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 124 851 95 CG 010 639

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TITLE Assertive Training for Women in Groups.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (83rd, Chicago, Illinois, August 30-September 2, 1975); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document
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EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Behavior Change; *Females; *Group Dynamics; *Individual Development; *Individual Power; Psychological Studies; Self Expression; Speeches; *Training Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Assertive Training

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effectiveness of group assertive training with nonassertive, noncollege age women. Twelve women, ages 22 to 53, participated in the assertive training program. Participants received six training sessions consisting of stimulus film vignettes; behavior rehearsal; peer, video, and trainer feedback; homework assignments; trainer and peer group support. Participants were compared with a group of 20 Ss who did not request assertive training and who were unaware of the assertive training program. Fifteen males and five females comprised the comparison group. The age range of the comparison group was 22 to 53, and all comparison Ss possessed at least a BA degree. Participants in the assertive training program improved significantly in their reported assertive behavior from pretesting to posttesting. Also, assertive training participants were significantly lower in reported assertive behavior than comparison group members prior to training, but participants were no different than comparison group members on completion of training. (Author)

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Assertive Training for Women in Groups

Gerald T. Jorgensen

Psychologists for some time have recognized the importance and value of assertive training as it is related to increased personal awareness and effectiveness (Salter, 1949). During the past several years there has been renewed interest in and increased experimental analysis of assertive training procedures (Alberti and Emmons, 1974; Bandura, 1969; Eisler, Hersen, & Miller, 1973; Galassi, Galassi, & Litz, 1974; Lazarus, 1973; McFall and Twentyman, 1973, Wolpe, 1969). Numerous studies have appeared demonstrating the effective use of assertive training procedures in a wide variety of clinical settings and for a number of different behavioral problems (Gay, Note 1). However, the majority of these studies seem to involve working with either socially anxious and nonassertive four-year college and university students or more clinical populations (Gay, Note 1).

Recently, the influence and growth of the women's movement with its emphasis on women's rights and conscious raising among women has raised interest in the area of assertive training for women in general (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973). Stimulus films entitled "Assertive Training for Women" have been produced (APGA, 1974), and numerous workshops have been conducted across the country in this area (Jakubowski-Spector, Note 2). However, there seems to have been little done to evaluate the effectiveness of programs attempting to combine the two popular areas of assertive training

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and the increased effectiveness of women in asserting themselves.

The present study is the result of an evaluation of an assertive training program for women. The program evaluated was designed to reach noncollege age and noncollege degree women in a midwestern community of moderate size. It was hypothesized that a group program using stimulus film vignettes, peer feedback, videotape feedback and trainer feedback would produce a significant increase in participants self-reported assertive behavior, and a significant decrease in the report of intensity of somatic symptoms accompanying anxiousness in asserting one's self. Also, it was hypothesized that the program would be well received and so evaluated by the participants. Furthermore, it was predicted that women choosing to participate in the program would be significantly lower in self-reported assertive behavior than a similar age group of college degree persons choosing not to participate in the program prior to training, but would be no different upon completion of an assertive training program.

The methodology of the present study, although it departed from that of previous studies in several ways, has been experimentally tested and found effective (Galassi et al, 1974). First, participants were taught to emit a series of assertive responses rather than a single response. In addition, participants learned several types of assertive behavior which included expressing affection, refusing requests, and initiating requests. Finally, knowledge of results on performance in behavior rehearsal situations was provided via peer, trainer and video feedback.

Method

Subjects

Brochures explaining the availability of the program and briefly describing it were mailed to several hundred women in the community and throughout the area. The program was one of many programs being offered at the time by the local Center for the Continuing Education of Women. There were also numerous announcements concerning the program--its availability and a brief description--via the local newspapers, radio stations and television station. The first 12 women to request to participate in the program were accepted. Ages of the women ranged from 22 to 53. Three of the women possessed college degrees (BA). Two of the women possessed nursing diploma degrees (RN). The remaining women were high school graduates.

Twenty persons comprised the similar age comparison group. Fifteen persons of the comparison group were men and five persons were women. Ages of the comparison group ranged from 22 to 55. All persons possessed college degrees (BA) and four persons possessed graduate degrees (either MA or MS). Eighteen persons were either middle school or secondary teachers. None of the comparison group persons had ever requested assertive training. However, 12 of the persons had previously participated in a two-day workshop in assertive training techniques for teachers and counselors. None of the people had previously completed the Adult Self Expression Scale.

Procedures

Participants in the treatment group received six assertive training sessions. Peer, video and trainer feedback and stimulus film vignettes were the primary components of the training sessions. Participants completed the Adult Self Expression Scale (Gay, Note 1), and two Symptom Checklists (Spinelli, Edie, & Nicoletti, Note 3) concerning two different self-expression areas prior to and upon the completion of training.

Comparison group individuals completed the Adult Self Expression Scale during the same week that the treatment group began their training program. Comparison group persons reported that they were not aware that another group was at that time beginning an assertive training program.

Description of Treatment

Assertive training was conducted in a group. The group was led by a male trainer who was the certified psychologist affiliated with the local College Center for the Continuing Education of Women. The sessions were designed to be one and one-half hours in length, although they usually lasted two hours, and were held twice a week.

Each session was divided into three thirty-minute segments. During the first segment, the group discussed the rationale for self-assertion, the criteria for self-assertion and the results of in vivo practice assignments as well as other incidents for self-assertion that had occurred since the last meeting. In addition, participants learned to discriminate among assertive, nonassertive and aggressive responses.

During the second and third segments, the group viewed stimulus film vignettes of situations commonly encountered by women which require an assertive response or they were presented assertive interactions by the trainer. Then participants divided into dyads which repeatedly practiced assertive responses to either the stimulus film vignettes or the trainer presented interactions. The dyads engaged in both directed and improvised behavior rehearsal. Each dyad member received at least two forms of feedback (peer, trainer, and/or video) on her performance during each session.

Trainer and group members used a standard format to evaluate assertive performance. Feedback was provided on such behaviors as eye contact, appropriateness and brevity of assertive statements, adequacy of delivery, and level of anxiety.

In order to minimize anxiety, the stimulus film vignettes and practice situations were presented in increasing order of difficulty. Also, the in vivo practice assignments after the first three sessions involved only assertion toward members of the same sex, while assignments after the remaining sessions were concerned with opposite sex interactions.

Instruments

The Adult Self Expression Scale (Gay, Note 1) was administered both before and after training. The 47 item scale taps assertiveness in a variety of situations and constitutes a self report measure.

The Symptom Checklists (Spinelli et al, Note 3) concerning two different self assertion areas were administered both before and after training. The 32

item checklist taps somatic symptoms which are commonly reported by persons as accompanying their anxiousness. The checklist constitutes a self report measure.

Participants also completed a post program questionnaire in which they were asked to express their attitudes toward and impressions of the training program.

Results

The assumption of a significant increase in training program participants' self-reported assertive behavior was tested and supported by a t-test, t (11) = -7.19, $p < .001$, on the pretest and posttest scores on the Adult Self Expression Scale. Significant differences in support of the above assumption also were obtained on the pretest and posttest scores of the two Symptom Checklists, t (11) = 5.40, $p < .001$; t (11) = 2.59, $p < .03$.

The prediction that women choosing to participate in the assertive training program would be significantly lower in self reported assertive behavior than a similar age comparison group of college degree persons prior to training but not significantly different upon completion of training was tested and supported by two separate t-tests. The first t-test was on the pretest Adult Self Expression Scale scores of the training program participants and the Adult Self Expression Scale scores of the comparison group, t (15) = -1.77, $p < .05$. The second t-test was on the posttest Adult Self Expression Scale scores of the training program participants and the Adult Self Expression Scale scores of the comparison group t (15) = 1.51, NS.

The results in Table 1 indicate that training program participants did significantly improve their self-reported assertive behavior and reported experiencing significantly less somatic symptoms commonly accompanying anxiousness when asserting themselves. Further support for the training program was achieved when pretest and posttest scores of participants were compared with a group not requesting the training program and presumed to already be assertive.

Insert Table 1 about here

Finally, upon completion of the training program, participants spoke very highly of the training program. Their written comments also indicated that they found the training program to be highly effective in improving their ability to assert themselves and to feel relaxed when so doing. Indeed, without any additional announcements, there have been numerous requests from women and women's organizations in the community to repeat the training program.

Discussion

The present study demonstrated the effectiveness of a multifaceted assertive training program with nonassertive, noncollege student, community women. The program which included the use of stimulus film vignettes and videotape feedback required participants to emit a sequence of assertive responses in behavior rehearsal situations. Significantly better performance was obtained by the participants upon the completion of the training

program on the three self-report measures. Also, participants were significantly lower in self-reported assertive behavior than similar age persons in a comparison group prior to beginning the assertive training program; however, upon the completion of the training program, participants were not significantly different in self-reported assertive behavior than the comparison group. It is important to note that the participants in the training program were all women with the majority possessing a high school education, whereas, the comparison group was comprised of primarily men with all members possessing a college education and some even recipients of advanced degrees. Also, it should be noted that the scores of the women in the comparison group were fairly assertive scores. Three of the women scored one standard deviation above the mean score of the comparison group and the other two women were within one standard deviation of the mean score of the comparison group (one being above the mean and the other below the mean). Finally, the participants in the training program highly evaluated verbally and in writing the effectiveness of the program. They strongly felt that they had indeed become more assertive and felt more relaxed in being assertive as a result of their participation in the training program. In fact, there has been numerous requests from women and women's organizations in the community for a repeat of the program without any additional announcements upon the completion of the initial training program.

The basic training program has previously been experimentally tested and found effective with nonassertive college students (Galassi et al, 1974).

The present study was an adaptation of the previous training program in two respects. First, it was used with noncollege student and noncollege age women. Second, because the participants were all women, stimulus film vignettes of common situations encountered by women and requiring an assertive response were incorporated into the training program. However, the contributions of the different components of the training program, namely, peer, trainer and videotape feedback, and stimulus film vignettes cannot be assessed by this study. Although, participants in the present training program ranked videotape feedback with and without trainer comments as number one and two in importance among the components of the program in helping them modify their behavior.

Finally, the present study seems to provide added support for the effectiveness of the Galassi et al (1974) basic assertive training program. Also, the present study seems to indicate that the basic training program can be adapted to meet the needs of noncollege student and/or degree and noncollege age women.

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Footnotes

This study was partially supported by Iowa Program IMPACT of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title I: Community Service and Continuing Education, U.S. Office of Education.

The author would like to thank Mary Jorgensen, Dolores Murphy and Louise Ottavi for their assistance in various phases of the study.

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Footnotes

[1]A detailed descriptive outline of session by session training procedures, stimulus film vignettes used, behavior rehearsal situations used, and copies of the Symptom Checklists used are available from the author. For a copy of the Adult Self Expression Scale and its scoring procedures, readers should contact John P. Galassi, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Counselor Education, School of Education, Peabody Hall, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Sample Sizes and t-Tests for the Training Group (T) and the Comparison Group (C) on Dependent Variables

Variable		Group		t-test	Group		t-test
		T-Pre	C		T-Post	C	
Adult Self	N	12	20		12	20	
Expression	SD	23.20	19.22		17.14	19.22	
Scale	M	100.00[a]	113.40[a]	-1.77[b,*]	123.58[a]	113.40[a]	1.51[c,*] -7.19[b,d,**]
Symptom	N	12			12		
Checklist	SD	19.32			16.99		
I[e]	M	35.67[f]			23.33[f]		5.40[b,**]
Symptom	N	12			12		
Checklist	SD	22.27			18.21		
II[g]	M	32.67[f]			25.50[f]		2.59[b,*]

[a]The higher the score the more self-assertive behavior reported.

[b]One-tailed t-test.

[c]Two-tailed t-test.

[d]t-test between T-Post and T-Pre Means.

[e]Area described: Standing Up for Yourself--Your Honest Rights.

Table 1 (cont'd.)

[f]The higher the score the more intense the somatic symptoms accompanying anxiousness are reported.

[g]Area described: Expressing Your Honest Feelings.

*p < .05

**p < .001